CHAPTER 16

AFRS IN POST-WAR AND KOREA

The loss of original entertainment programming production at Hollywood headquarters weakened AFRS's connection with operations in the field. To Roy Neal, the first Station Manager at AFN-Frankfurt, "AFRS was something `over there' whose shortwave sounded terrible and whose records were marvelous. That's all AFRS was to us. It was a source of records."

That growing independence from Los Angeles didn't lessen the importance of military broadcasting for the troops overseas. A poll taken in the United States during 1945-46 showed that only one person in ten across the country owned a radio. Yet, in the area covered by AFN, the PX sold 102,000 radios in the first year of operation. That figures out to one radio for every three soldiers.(1)

There was no doubt a strong desire for "a little bit of home" by the occupying forces. Still, the Armed Forces Network had no assurance that AFRS would continue into the postwar period. The survival of military broadcasting depended on how well it fulfilled its mission of informing and educating its audience with entertainment and news.

In October, 1945, Roy Neal asked General Eisenhower if he would speak on the radio to the troops. They were growing edgy about not going home. It turned out to be the Supreme Commander's farewell speech, one which AFN fed to the world.

Eisenhower didn't deal with the matter of troop rotation, however, and the problem grew worse under his successor, General Joseph McNarney. There was even talk of a strike among the troops and according to Neal, the threat "was quite real."(2)

I & E BECOMES ENTERTAINMENT

To solve the problem, Neal came up with an idea: "My plan was very basic. If you talk to people, if you communicate to them on their level, then usually you can reason with them." Neal introduced a question-and-answer program to the troops in a series of spot announcements. The spots encouraged the soldiers to send in postcards with questions for the Army command. Each week, the network selected representative questions. The soldiers who sent in the selected queries flew to (AFN-) Frankfurt to sit down with the Generals and ask their questions on the air, live, on Sunday evenings.(3)

The program began in December, 1945.

"The show not only worked, but within two to three weeks, the troops knew when they could plan on going home. They knew how the point system worked. They knew troops were coming in and in what numbers. They knew where those troops were going to go because the Generals were answering their questions."(4)

The program also helped improve the image of AFN. After the troop anxiousness died down, General McNarney sent letters of appreciation to the Network. His Chief of Staff followed with a call asking why both officers and enlisted staff at AFN had such low ranks. Neal explained that everyone at the network had arrived in a temporary duty status:

"There's no table of organization for this outfit. None of us ever get a raise. Actor Mickey Rooney has been around here for two years. He came in as a buck Sergeant and he's still a buck Sergeant." The General told Neal to ask Lieutenant Colonel Oren Swain, the Network's senior officer, to draft a table of organization. The General promised it would be approved.(5)

It's uncertain if Mickey ever got his promotion.

Meanwhile, AFN began coverage of one of the most significant events of the immediate postwar period. In early November, 1945, Johnny Hayes, AFN-Frankfurt News Director called Corporal Harold Burson into his office to discuss "an assignment that we've got to fill, a very sensitive one." Burson worked in the news department. He'd transferred from the AFN-Paris office in July. He'd worked with the Corps of Engineers, the 12th Army's Publicity and Psychological Warfare Detachment and the Press Section of the 15th Army.

"I need somebody who is apolitical," Hayes explained, "somebody who'll report what he hears. The event is the Nuernberg Trial. We want to staff it and we want to make a major effort at covering it. We're prepared to give you fifteen minutes every night at 9 PM."(6)

Burson, who'd been a reporter for the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, agreed to take on the assignment. However, he suggested that AFN present five minutes of news and then ten minutes of trial coverage. Hayes accepted the change and then gave Burson a correspondent's accreditation with all the rights of other reporters covering the trial. He sent him to see General Paul Thompson, Chief of the Information and Education Division in General Eisenhower's Headquarters. There, Thompson briefed him about the importance of the assignment.(7)

Thompson told Burson that he considered coverage of the Nuernberg Trial a critical job.

"The responsibility is such that you're going to be, in a way, the official source of a lot of information to a lot of people. All Europe's going to get their information from

you and we want unemotional reporting." Since Burson was an enlisted man, Thompson instructed him to call headquarters directly if he had problems with accreditation or anything else. Furthermore, he said, "If anyone tries to coerce you, saying it is under the Army auspice and they don't like what you are reporting and they tell you to lay off of this, or don't do that, any attempt to censor you, you call me!"(8)

The American Government saw the Nuernberg Trial as politically sensitive with the Allies all playing off each other. Events needed to be reported as objectively as possible to establish a clear record of what had taken place. Burson went to Nuernberg and reported the trial for AFN until the middle of February, 1946. By then the proceedings were near the end and he was close to accumulating enough points to rotate back to the States. Because of his southern accent, AFN kept Burson off the air. Instead, an announcer with him read his written reports from a broadcast booth in the courthouse.

The program ran ten minutes in length and later five minutes after the trial settled into a regular routine. It travelled to the AFN station in Nuernberg and from there to Network headquarters in Frankfurt for distribution to all the affiliate stations.(9)

Burson's reports of the trial informed the American troops what had happened in Germany under Hitler and helped them understand why they were there as an occupying Army. The accurate coverage of Nuernberg also enhanced AFN's credibility as a news source that could be trusted. The commitment to on-the-spot and objective news reporting which Burson showed at Nuernberg, helped insure the survival of the Network.

Colonel Swain had no idea whether the European Command would maintain the Network when he officially became AFN commander on April 1, 1946. When he arrived, he found that a less-than-military demeanor existed. Swain was the first AFN chief who'd graduated from West Point. He intended to run the organization as a normal Army unit as long as it lasted.

Swain ordered the broadcaster soldiers to fall in for training every morning. When he did, station manager Neal advised the commander, "You should realize, Sir, that many of your troops work all night. We're an all-night, 'round-the-clock operation. We're going to have to do something drastic if you really insist that they fall out and have morning training."

That didn't deter Swain. Except for those who were on the air early in the morning, everyone would take part. Neal decided that he couldn't maintain the overnight operation, do the newscast and have the staff appear for morning exercise, too. So, he simply folded the 7:00 AM newscast - the favorite news program of the Theater Commander. The next morning, he led his men in physical training and then went to his office.

Then he waited.

Soon came a call from the General wanting to know what'd happened to the news. That ended Colonel Swain's morning P.T.!(10)

AFN had ready access to experienced radio and news people and Swain transferred them into his operation during the war. As long as the United States maintained a draft, experienced broadcasters were available. Civilian broadcasters were likewise willing to sign up for overseas duty, particularly after Europe began to recover from the wartime devastation.

With the smaller concentration of forces, staffing the stations with experienced personnel was always more of a problem for AFRS than it was for AFN. Military personnel were more often recruited because of the difficulty of hiring civilians for remote areas.

Unlike AFRS in the Pacific, Roy Neal, who also became the AFN Program Manager, noted, "We weren't a splintered operation. Once we had the network properly organized, I was constantly doing things out of Munich, Berlin, Nuernberg and other stations, and I was constantly going back to places such as Paris. We were operating on a theater-wide basis."

With technical resources available, including original magnetic tape recorders, AFN recorded live programs when the USO performed for the troops and then built shows around the recordings. Such creativity "also gave our network increased stature. We were those wonderful fellows who brought you Bob Hope when he first arrived in Europe.

AFRS IN THE FAR EAST

The troops' need for American entertainment programming was even higher on remote islands and in the Far East. There, loneliness and cultural differences made it more difficult for soldiers to adjust to overseas duty. The great distances between stations forced the small staffs to rely almost exclusively on the AFRS package for programming.

Far East postwar operations were much like that of the Mosquito Network and the Jungle Network. In February, 1945, the Jungle Network moved its headquarters from Hollandia, New Guinea to Manila where WVTR went on the air in March.

FAR EAST NETWORK ESTABLISHED

Once settled into the new facilities, Major Graf Boepple, OIC of the Manila station, decided that a name change for the Network was in order. He wrote a report to MacArthur's Headquarters for the April 1 to June 30, 1945, quarter. "With the extension of the Armed Forces Radio Service into populated areas of the Philippines," he

explained, "the former title 'Jungle Network' became a misnomer. That necessitated adopting a new name for this organization. Therefore on June 17, 1945, the former 'Jungle Network' officially became the 'Far East Network.' The chain of fourteen active broadcasting stations extended from Milne Bay, New Guinea to Manila, Philippine Islands."(12)

Boeppel procured eight mobile radio stations to be established following the planned invasion of the Japanese islands. He use the 400-watt transmitters from the stations-on-wheels that followed the troops throughout the island-hoping campaign. His staff built each self-contained, soundproofed studio on the frame of a two-and-a-half ton truck. A complete record library was included and augmented by transcriptions that came from AFRS headquarters.(13)

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war sooner than expected, but AFRS was ready. When General Douglas MacArthur landed at Atsugi Airport on August 30, 1945, to arrange for the Japanese surrender, the AFRS staff from Manila was right behind him to establish broadcast operations. *Radio Daily* of September 7, 1945, reported that four mobile radio stations began operating in Japan and one in Korea during the first week of the occupation. *Broadcasting* reported on September 24, 1945, that FEN had network stations located in Tokyo, Nagasaki, Osaka, and Aomgri.

Many claims exist regarding which station went on the air first in Japan. In his 1961 report entitled, *A Brief History of the Far East Network*, author Jordan Roscoe reached several conclusions:

"The first actual American troop broadcast in Japan originated from a portable transmitter operated by the 2nd Marine Division in Northern Kyush. It probably used the call letters WVTO, no later than September 1, 1945. The first Army radio station, WLKH, came from the 24th Infantry Division at Kure. It went on the air within the first 15 days of September. WVTQ, the first official AFRS station in permanent studios, went on the air September 12, from the Osaka headquarters of NHK, the Japanese national broadcasting system. The first use of the "Far East Network" designation took place on September 21, when WVTR went on the air in Tokyo. The first AFRS station to go on the air officially, WLKD in Sapporo, began broadcasting on September 22. Finally, WVTR in Tokyo and WVTQ in Osaka officially went on the air on September 23."(14)

To obtain use of Japanese facilities, Boepple met with representatives from the Army Signal Corps and the Japanese government shortly after he arrived in Tokyo from Manila. He explained that his Far East Network wanted to use one of the two powerful radio stations in Tokyo for sixteen-and-a-half hours each day. He would use it along with the Number Two Japanese Network that included 10-KW outlets in Hiroshima, Nagoya, Yamaoto, Sapporo, Osaka, Senai and Tokyo. After two hours of discussion using interpreters, they reached an agreement. Following approval by the Japanese Ministry of Communications, FEN officially went on the air, on Sunday, September 23, at 6:30 am with the program day lasting until 11 PM.(15)

The Japanese could keep their 80-station Number One Network on the air subject to U.S. censorship. American music, news and sports soon permeated the airways anyway. FEN retained the Japanese engineering and technical staff. By January 1, 1947, the Far East Network was comprised of sixteen stations. Seven were in Japan and one each in Manila, Okinawa, Guam, Iwo Jima, Saipan, the Admiralty Islands, and Seoul, Chonju, and Pusan in Korea.

FEN remained a network in name only as the Tokyo outlet merely fed news and special events by shortwave. Then, in August 1947, the Tokyo flagship station began feeding programming to Osaka four hours a week by landlines. Each local station played the AFRS transcription package and produced its own programming.(16)

FEN stations dropped from a peak of thirty-nine FEN stations at the beginning of '46 to sixteen a year later, as bases consolidated and troops went home. Even so, FEN began to resemble a functioning radio network. In March, 1947, FEN held the first AFRS conference in the Far East. In attendance were radio officers from all I & E Sections and OICs of radio stations from all the major elements of the Far East Command (FEC). The attendees discussed the proposed GHQ FEC Circular 49, the first formal recognition of the Far East Network. Officially released on May 3, 1947, this circular set forth the mission, organization and functions of AFRS in the Far East Command. The Radio Officer, I & E Section, would direct AFRS under the supervision of the Information Officer, GHQ FEC.(17)

This evolution into a functioning network continued during 1948 with regularly scheduled station manager meetings. WVTR Tokyo started an AFRS school and "radio clinic" to improve FEN's on-the-air service. The station hired a "speech clinician" to travel to the stations and work with the announcers. By the next year, the clinician had become a "speech correctionalist" who taught speech fundamentals and distributed a pamphlet of speech aids.(18)

FIRST AFRS STATIONS IDENTIFIED BY LOCATION

By early 1949, FEN consisted of eleven stations located in Japan, Korea, Okinawa, the Philippine Islands and Marianna Islands. On September 15th, all FEN stations

stopped using call letters and began identifying themselves with the geographical location followed by "Armed Forces Radio Service." (19)

FEN, like AFN and the other AFRS operations, provided the theater and base commanders with an immediate means to reach their troops with information on all subjects. Edgar Tidwell, who served with the Jungle Network during the war, returned to the Far East in 1949 as Executive Officer of FEN and later as Network Commander. He maintained close liaison with the station managers through the semiannual meetings in Tokyo. He went into the field regularly with the Network Chief Engineer and Program Director to check station operations. When on the bases, he'd "always go in to see the Commander and ask how things were going and if he had any suggestions or ideas." Tidwell's meetings helped maintain good relationships and insured a quick response in times of crisis.

AFRS IN BERLIN

Nowhere was AFRS's value in an emergency better demonstrated than during the Berlin Air Lift of 1948. The Russian blockade of Berlin provided AFN with its biggest news challenge of the immediate postwar years. AFN newsmen flew back and forth to Berlin aboard the planes carrying supplies to the besieged city. They conducted spot interviews with the flight crews and talked with Berliners. When the blockade ended, AFN had newsmen at Helmstedt and Berlin to cover the first post-blockage train to move through East Germany.

The Russian challenge in Berlin changed the thinking of the Western Powers. From simply an occupying force, the Western military role became one of defense. West Germany became an ally rather than occupied territory. NATO was established, and with it the reality that American forces would remain in Europe.

During the Berlin crisis, AFN displayed a powerful influence not only on the morale of American troops, but on the civilian population who listened to the programming. The Berlin station was on the air twenty-four hours a day, providing both entertainment and a homing signal for the Air Lift pilots! AFN assured Berliners that the United States was present in their city, to stay.

Many believe the Berlin Crisis of 1948 saved the Network. While they may be overstating the case, it is true that the size of the American military had been decreasing since the end of World War II. The confrontation with the Soviet Union in Berlin led to a new build-up of the American military in Europe. That established a continuing need for AFN to provide entertainment, news, information and education. The Communist invasion of South Korea furthered the build up of American Forces around the world. That guaranteed the continued need for AFRS.

AFRS IN KOREA

AFN's contribution during the Berlin Crisis demonstrated the important role which military radio fills in an emergency. FEN's response to the attack on South Korea in June, 1950, once again demonstrated the value of AFRS in a war setting. When North Korea crossed the 38th parallel, AFRS had only the station in Seoul. The FEN station at Fukuoka, Japan, beamed programming to American troops in the southern parts of South Korea. While the American Armed Forces fought to stem the invasion and then counter-attacked at Inchon, AFRS followed the troops.

As it had repeatedly done for a decade, armed forces broadcasting once again would prove its immeasurable value. In the crisis setting of the Far East, it would again provide news, information and entertainment to the troops and command alike.

But, not without a high price.

NOTES - CHAPTER 16

(1) Interview with Roy Neal, August 3, 1983.
(2) Neal interview.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Interview with Harold Burson, March 7, 1984.
(7) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Ibid.
(11) Ibid.
(12) Quarterly Report, April 1 to 30, 1945, for Armed Forces Radio Section, Information and Education Detachment, AFPAC, Jordan Roscoe, *A Brief History of the Far East Network*, 1961. Cited hereafter as Roscoe.
(13) Roscoe; Interview with Frank Tourtellotte, September 29, 1982.
(14) Roscoe.
(15) Press release, CHQ, U.S. Army Forces, Pacific, Sept 14, 1945; *New York Times*, Sept 25, 1945, p 46.
(16) Roscoe.
(17) Ibid.
(18) Ibid.
(19) Ibid.